

FORGIVENESS, FREEDOM, FAVOR

NO. 2276

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, OCTOBER 2, 1892
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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“And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD's release.”
Deuteronomy 15:2

THIS wonderful transaction of “the LORD's release” came at the end of every seven years. It was according to the gracious law of God for Israel that there should be, first of all, a rest one day in seven. Next, there were feast days one month in seven, and then there came, every seventh year, a year of rest for the land in which they did not till it, but left it to lie fallow. Then, after the seven sevens were complete, there came on the fiftieth year, an extraordinary year of rest, in addition to the usual one, this was called the year of Jubilee.

I believe that there is a spiritual meaning in this succession of rests, but I have not time to enter upon the explanation of it now, except to say that doubtless, that last seven of sevens represents the restitution of all things, when the Lord Jesus shall have gathered His people in to rest forever and ever with Himself in His glory.

Till then, we go from seven to seven every week, our Sabbaths are so many staves of the golden ladder by which we climb up to the eternal Sabbath. We bless God that we still retain at least, that vestige of the seven, for blessed are our eyes that they see, and our hearts that they enjoy the one day of rest every week. What would we do without it?

Once then, in seven years, there was a year of perfect rest, and I cannot help remarking again, as I did in the reading, what happy people the chosen people would have been, if they had but hearkened to God's commands! Only imagine a country where, for a whole year, there would be nothing to do. The land would bring forth her own fruit, and everybody might eat of it, sitting under his own vine and fig tree, having no tillage of the field or pruning of the vine, but having an opportunity given to him of spending the whole year in the service and worship of the Most High.

When the people afterwards revolted from the Lord, and desired a king to reign over them, He told them by the mouth of the prophet Samuel, the manner of the king whom they would choose, so that they might know the difference between the Lord's rule and their king's. The earthly monarchs would ground them down, and oppressed them, and brought them into all manner of bondage, but the Lord's yoke was only this, that they should rest and serve Him here, and enjoy Him forever hereafter.

These high privileges were attended, in the case of the people of Israel, with high spiritual commands. The laws given to Israel were not intended for Moabites, and Edomites, and Egyptians. They could not have understood them, they would probably even have laughed at them, but the spiritually minded among God's chosen people, and there were some such, would delight in these commands, and obey them.

Look at the command in the present chapter, that any Israelite, who had sold his liberty to a brother Hebrew, should go free at the end of six years. It was a strange command, a blessedly generous one, but it was added that he should not go out empty, but that he should be furnished with abundant help from the flock, from the threshing floor, and from the winepress, and that he who gave him this fresh start in life should not do it grudgingly.

The Hebrew has it, "Loading him, he shall be loaded; thou shalt adorn his neck with thy gifts." He was to have an abundance given to him, and this was to be done cheerfully, not grudgingly. A delight was to be felt in thus setting free a brother of the chosen race, and starting him once more on the journey of life. It is a grand command.

Do you not think that it should always be so, that they who receive much should have much required of them, and that they who serve a generous God should be themselves generous? Is there not reason in that precept of the Savior, "Freely ye have received, freely give"? May not the Lord expect of us much more than He does of others?

If you are chosen out of mankind, redeemed from among men, called out from the fallen mass, quickened with a life which they do not know, and privileged with access to God and communion with heaven to which they are strangers, should not the law of God's house be a higher and a nobler one than a law that could be given to those who are strangers to Him, and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel?

Do not therefore, if you are Christians, measure yourselves with others and say, "If I do as much as my neighbor does, it suffices." You who are of the blood royal of heaven, princes in God's kingdom, will you behave yourselves like paupers? You who have been redeemed with blood, whose every fetter has been struck off, will you act like slaves? Let it not be so. Rise to your true dignity. Act worthy of your privileges, and accept with joy of your Father and your King a law which others cannot understand, and which they would think unreasonable and impracticable.

It was so with the laws which were given to these people. It is true that, on one side of them, they were somewhat toned down in certain respects to suit their weaknesses, but in other respects they were heightened and elevated above what any human legislature would ever have thought of enacting.

However, that is not my subject tonight. I want to speak to you about the Lord's release.

It seems to me that this passage, first of all, teaches us concerning *the release which the Lord desired His people to give*, but secondly, and typically, it speaks to us of *the release which the Lord Himself gives to us*. He does not command us to do what He will not much more abundantly do Himself. "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Your Lawgiver is Himself an example of the fulfillment of every gracious and noble precept in His own law.

I. First then, let us consider THE RELEASE WHICH THE LORD DESIRED HIS PEOPLE TO GIVE.

First, *they were to forgive their debtors*. They were, at the end of every seven years, to release every man his debtor from the debt which he had accumulated. I suppose that as soon as the year began, there was a release given. A man might pay if he could, and he should do so. A man might, at some future time, if his circumstances altered, discharge the debt which had been remitted, but as far as the creditor was concerned, it was remitted.

It is the opinion of some commentators that it only signifies that the man was to be let alone during that year, but the debt still remained. I do not think that such an interpretation would have occurred to anybody who read the chapter by itself. You can take the idea to the chapter, and foist it upon it if you like, but it certainly is not there in the natural run of the words. All the Jewish interpreters, albeit that they often twisted their laws, are agreed upon this, that it was an absolute forgiveness of the debt incurred which was intended here, and I will not give our Jewish brethren any blame for being too lenient in money matters.

I think perhaps, that they may be a little inclined the other way, and if their Rabbis all teach that this was an absolute wiping out of the debt, I think that for once, I must agree with their Rabbis and accept their interpretation, as it evidently is the plain meaning of the passage.

I am no learned man, and therefore I read the passage as it stands. I think that the Lord would have the creditor at the end of six years absolutely wipe out the debt, and I am more certain of it because He anticipates the objection that many would begin to say, "The year of release is at hand," and would therefore refuse to lend.

Many of them who were what is called prudent, and who were inclined towards hard-heartedness, would naturally say, "No, we are not going to make a loan when it is so near the time when it will have to be forgiven, and the loan will become a gift." Hence the Lord says, "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand, and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought."

Oh, what a relief it must have been to the debtors! And when it was really done, what a comfort and lightness of heart it must have brought to the creditors too, when they saw their poor brethren able to enjoy life again, and no longer having their days darkened with the shadow of a heavy debt!

The next thing was that *they were never to exact that debt again*. Observe in the text, "He shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother." After that year he was to have no further claim, or if he thought that he had a claim, he was never to use any legal means, or any kind of physical force, or any threats, to obtain what was due. It was to be regarded as done with, as far as any legal claim was concerned. The moral claim might remain, and the honest, upright minded Israelite might take care that his brother Israelite should not lose anything through him, but still, according to the divine command, there was to be no exacting of it.

My dear brother Williams, in his prayer, spoke of the generosity of God as seen in these commands, and depend upon it, none but a generous Lawgiver would have made such a law as this. It is noble-hearted, full of lovingkindness, and we could expect that none but a people in whose midst there was the daily sacrifice, in the midst of whom moved the high priest of God, would be obedient to such a precept.

Observe next, that *they were to do this for the Lord's sake*, "because it is called the LORD's release." They were to do it with an eye to a blessing from God, "For the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it: only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God." It is not enough to do the correct thing, it must be done in a right spirit, and with a pure motive.

A good action is not wholly good unless it be done for the glory of God, and because of the greatness and goodness of His holy name. It would ennoble an Israelite to give a release to one's debtor and say, "It is called the LORD's release," to act, as it were, as lieutenant of the great King of kings. It will ennoble you to give a discharge, not in your own name, but in Christ's name, and for His sake, because you love Him.

The most powerful motive that a Christian can have is this, "For Jesus' sake." You could not forgive the debt perhaps for your brother's sake, there may be something about him that would harden your heart, but can you not do it for Jesus' sake? This is true charity, that holy love which is the choicest of the graces. That text in John's first epistle is not only, "We love him because he first loved us," but many versions read it, "We love because he first loved us." Even our love towards men, when it flows out in acts of mercy and deeds of kindness, should spring from the fact that Christ first loved us.

And then, like the Israelites, we may look believingly to the gracious reward that God gives. We do not serve God for wages, but still we have respect unto the recompense of the reward, even as Moses had. We do not run like hirelings, but we have our eye upon the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus.

A Christian should often perform acts of kindness, for which he may only meet ingratitude, acts of kindness to the unthankful and to the evil, in the full belief that there will come a day when Christ will accept such things as done unto Himself, and will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink."

This law given to Israel is a law given to us so far as the motive for keeping it is concerned. Let us do good unto all men, for God's glory, for Christ's sake, and let us have an eye to that day when every holy action done unto the Lord shall receive reward from Him.

Next, notice, as you read down the chapter, that they were not only to perform this kindness once, but *they were to be ready to do it again*. The creditor who had absolved his debtor once, must not begin to say to himself, "I shall not lend any more, this business of the seven years, this statute of limitations,

makes a dead loss of it.” No, if he thinks so, the ninth verse tells him that it is a thought in his wicked heart, “Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart.”—“In thy heart of Belial”—so the Hebrew runs, as if such a thought brought him down from Israel to Belial, and made the man of God to be a loose man, a man who feared not JEHOVAH at all.

Beloved, it is the part of Christians not to be weary in well doing, and if they get no reward for what they have done from those to whom it is done, still to do the same again. Remember how gracious God is, and how He gives to the unthankful and the evil, and makes His rain to fall upon the field of the churl as well as upon the field of the most generous. He is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. We may carry the idea of only helping the worthy a great deal too far, till we cease to be imitators of Christ, and rather become dispensers of justice than of love, and this is not the work for a Christian man to do.

Next, observe, that while they were to forgive and remit, on this seventh year, the loans which remained unpaid, *they were also to let the bondman go*. He was a Hebrew, but he was so poor that he had sold his land, and now at last, he had been obliged to sell himself into slavery. “Take me,” said he, “and I will be your servant if you give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on,” and the law allowed it, and so there were some few Hebrews who had their fellow Hebrews in servitude to them.

That servitude was of an exceedingly light kind, for if ever one of these so-called slaves ran away, it was contrary to the law to return him to his master, he might break the servitude when he pleased. At the end of the sixth year, when the Hebrew servant might go free, it often happened that he had been treated so well in his servitude that he had no desire to go, but he was willing to have the awl thrust through the lobe of his ear, that he might be fastened to the doorpost of his master to abide in servitude as long as he lived. But at the end of the six years, the Hebrew servant was free to go if so it pleased him.

Now, according to the law, *the bondman was to be sent away freely*. It was not to be thought a hardship to part with a servant man or woman. However useful they might have been in the house or field, however much they were felt to be necessary to domestic comfort or farm service, they were to be allowed to go, and what was more, they were *not to go empty handed*, but they were to receive a portion out of every department of the master’s wealth, from his flock, his threshing floor, and his winepress. They were to go away well loaded, even as Israel went out of Egypt, as we read, “He brought them forth also with silver and gold.”

This was a grand law, and does it not teach God’s people how kind they ought to be? A miserable, miserly, hard, close-fisted Christian—is there such a thing? It is not for me to be a judge. One who would take his brother’s labor without payment, and at the end of the term would offer him no kind of remuneration, but leave him to starve—is he a child of God? How dwells the love of God in him? God would have His people not only do what is righteous, but what is generous, and act, not only justly, but kindly to all with whom they come in contact.

Further, *this setting free of their brother at the specified time was to be done for a certain reason*, “thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee.” How can you hold another a bondman when God has set you free? How can you treat another with unkindness when the Lord has dealt so generously with you?

Down at Olney, when Mr. Newton was the rector of the parish, he put up in his study this text where he could always see it when he lifted his eyes from his text while preparing his sermon, “Remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee.”

Would it not do many Christians good if they had that text often before their eyes? Would it not excite gratitude to their Redeemer, and tenderness towards those who happened to be in subjection to them, tenderness to every sinner that is a bond slave under the law, tenderness to the myriads that swarm these streets, slaves to sin and self, and who are perishing in their iniquity? This was to be the reason why Israel should act generously towards bondservants. Let it stand as a reason why we should act kindly towards all about us.

As far as most of us are concerned, it may be that we are not creditors to anybody, and we are not likely to crush anybody by exacting their debts. If we do not happen to be in that position, yet the law is spiritual, and it has its own teaching, and surely it means just this—*Let us readily forgive.*

I know not how true it is, but I have heard that if that venerable and godly man, Mr. Rowland Hill, had any kind of fault, it was that sometimes, when he thought that persons had acted very wrongly to him, he could not very readily forgive them. One of his hearers said he remembered that one Sabbath day, Mr. Hill had spoken very severely about a certain person, not more severely than was just, but perhaps more severely than was generous, and when he was offering the prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses,” the hearer noticed that the good man hesitated at the words, “As we—as we—forgive them that trespass against us.” He had evidently a little struggle with himself, and he was so sincere and transparent a man that he showed it even in the public service.

Do not some of you at times find it rather difficult to forgive those that trespass against you? Possibly you have been very angry with your boy this afternoon, it would have been as well to have given him a kiss before you left home. It may be that your dear girl has in some way offended you, it would have been as well to have told her that you had forgiven her. You had good reasons perhaps, for not doing so, I will not go into them. However, may I ask you to forgive her as soon as you get home? It may be that you will be doing no good to your child by doing what is hardly justifiable as from yourself.

Be ready to forgive your children. There is reason to make that remark, for I have known persons sitting here who have excluded a son or daughter from their house because of some marriage that the parents did not like, or for some other reason. You said, “She shall never darken my door again.” And you are a Christian man!

I would say to you, if I knew you were here, “I wish that you would never darken the communion table again until that kind of feeling was gone from you once for all!” How can you say, “Our Father, which art in heaven,” while there is still towards your own child, whether young or old, something which you say you cannot forgive? Make up your mind never to go to heaven if you cannot forgive people, for you cannot enter the pearly gates while you cherish an unforgiving spirit.

Or is it some friend of yours with whom you have quarreled? You two have parted, you were dear friends once, but now, like a great cliff that has been split in the middle, there you stand frowning upon one another. Let it be so no longer. If there is any personal pique or ill will, let it be cast into the depths of the sea. Whatever may be the story, I do not want to hear it. Surely the time has come when all that should be wiped out once for all. “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath,” is a good precept.

I have heard of two friends who had differed greatly and spoken very bitterly, and the sun was just going down, so one of them said, “I must not let the sun go down on my wrath. I will go and try to be reconciled to my friend,” and half way to his friend’s house, he met his friend coming to him on the same errand, and they met joyfully to forgive each other. May it be so with all true Christians!

Once again, dear friends, I think the spirit of this release of the Lord is this, *Never be hard on anybody*. It is true that the man made the bargain, and he ought to keep to it, but he is losing money and he cannot afford it, he is being ruined, and you are being fattened by his mistake. Do not hold him to it. If you have made a losing bargain, you should stand to it, for the Christian “swareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.”

But if the loss is on the other side, cancel the bond as speedily as may be, and let not the poor man have to go with his tears before Almighty God, and blame you for your cruelty. No Christian man can be a sweater of workers, no Christian can be a grinder of the poor, no man who would be accepted before God can think that his heart is right with Him when he treats others ungenerously, not to say unjustly.

That, I think, is the spirit of the first part of my subject, the release which the Lord desired His people to give, that which is called, “the LORD’s release.”

II. But now, secondly, and as briefly as I can, let us consider THE RELEASE WHICH THE LORD GIVES TO US.

Let me proclaim to every sinner here who owns his indebtedness to God, and feels that he can never discharge it, that if you will come and put your trust in Christ, the Lord promises *oblivion to all your debt*, forgiveness of the whole of your sins. I need not repeat the long black list, for conscience has made you read it up and down, and down and up, and you have become familiar with the roll of your iniquities. The Lord is prepared to wipe them all out, He will do what He bids His people do, “it is called the LORD’s release.” He will release thee from thy sin if thou believest in Jesus Christ.

This release shall be followed up by *a non-exacting of the penalty forever*. If you are pardoned of God, He will never exact of you any punishment because of your iniquities or transgressions, nay, neither in this life, nor in that which is to come, will He require it at your hands. He will give you a full discharge, one that can be pleaded in the High Court of Heaven above. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again.”

If you will come to your God, acknowledging your debt, and confessing your inability to pay it, He will so wipe it out that you shall never hear of it again for ever, and if your sins be searched for, they shall not be found.

Notice next, that God will do all this for you *on the ground of your poverty*. Look at the fourth verse, “Save when there shall be no poor among you.” They should not remit a debt if ever there should come a time when there should be no poor among them, but as long as there was a man who was poor, they were to remit the debt. You noticed how we sang—

*“Tis perfect poverty alone
That sets the soul at large.”*

When you cannot pay half a farthing in the pound of all your great debt of sin, when you are absolutely bankrupt, then may you believe that Jesus Christ is your Savior. When you are absolutely helpless and hopeless, only believe that Jesus is the Christ, and put your trust in Him, and God will remit and discharge all your liabilities, and you shall go away clear before Him.

I may be addressing a soul here that says, “I like that thought, I wish I could catch hold of it, but I feel myself to be such a slave that I cannot grasp it.” Well, *the Lord may allow a soul to be in bondage for a time*, indeed it may be needful that He should. The Hebrew might be in bondage six years, and yet he went free when the seventh year came.

There are reasons why the Spirit of God is to some men a Spirit of bondage for a long time. Hard hearts must be melted, proud stomachs must be brought down. Some men’s wills are like an iron sinew, some men’s self-righteousness is hard to slay, even though it be shot through the heart seven times. There are many who would be rebellious against God very soon if they found forgiveness too soon, so He brings down their heart with labor, they fall and there is none to help.

I may be speaking to one here who has been a long time in bondage. I passed through that state myself, and many a time have I gripped the hand of a poor man or woman in abject distress and despair, almost ready to go into an asylum, and I have said, “I know all about that experience, I know that the Lord does for a while, suffer the heart to be ploughed, and torn, and rent, to make it ready for the good seed.”

Have you ever seen God’s ten black horses come out, I mean the ten commandments. Have you heard the ploughman crack the whip, have you seen that awful plough that is just behind those horses, and how they have dragged that plough up the soul and back again, and up the soul and back again, till the field of the soul has been ploughed from end to end?

Then, when you thought that the work was all done, the horses have been turned sideways, and there has been cross-ploughing back and back again, tearing up the whole nature, and breaking every clod to powder. God has His scarifiers at work upon some men, yet for all that it is not because He hates them,

but because He loves them, and means to get out of them a heavy harvest of joy and thankfulness in the years to come.

Once more, *the man was set free at the end of the sixth year*, paying nothing for his liberation. Though not freeborn, nor yet buying his liberty with a great sum, yet he was set free. O Lord, set some soul free tonight! Oh, that every slave here, who is in bondage, may get his liberty tonight, to the praise of the glory of God's grace!

And when the Lord sets poor souls at liberty, *He always sends them away full-handed*. He gives something from the flock, and from the threshing floor, and from the winepress. Some of us were rich indeed, the first day we came to Jesus. We know more now than we knew then, but we do not possess more than we had then, for we had Christ then, and He is all, and we cannot get more than all. God gave us heaven within us then. Oh, how we laughed for joy that day! We shall never forget it. We were not to be beggars or paupers any more, all the riches of heaven were bestowed upon us.

There is one thing which may be said here. *This act never seems hard to the Lord*. He says to the Hebrew, in the eighteenth verse, "It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free." It never seems hard to Christ when He sets a sinner free. Why, some of you pray as if you thought that Christ was hard hearted! It is you who are hard hearted. You pray as if you thought God had to be moved to mercy. It is you who need to be moved to accept the mercy. God is generous enough, He will set you free, and load you daily with His benefits, and delight to do it, if you trust His dear Son.

In fact, to make worlds is nothing to Him compared with saving souls. He takes the big hammer of His omnipotence, and brings it down on the anvil of His wisdom, and worlds fly like sparks all over the sky when He is at that work, and He thinks nothing of it. But He rests in His love and rejoices over His people with singing when He is at work for their salvation. This is the very joy of His heart, it is never hard for Him to set free those who have been in bondage.

One thing I feel sure of and that is, *if the Lord sets us free, we shall want to remain His servants forever*. We will go straight away to the doorpost, and ask Him to use the awl, for though we are glad to be free, we do not want to be free from Him. No, no! "O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant...Thou hast loosed my bonds." Once set free, then I wish to be bound to the Lord forever.

Come, dear heart, if you find Christ tonight, if you believe in Him, and are at liberty, come and have your ear bored. You do not like baptism, come and have your ear bored. You do not like to join the church, and confess Christ. Well, I know that it may be a "bore" to you, but for all that, come and have your ear bored. Come and say, "I will go no more out for ever. Since the Lord has set me free, I will serve Him all my days."

The Lord bless these words to many, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

LEVITICUS 25:1-7 AND 17-22 AND DEUTERONOMY 15:1-18

Leviticus Chapter 25. Verses 1-2. *And the LORD spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the LORD.*

The Jews had much rest provided for them. If they had had faith enough to obey God's commands, they might have been the most favored of people, but they were not a spiritual people, and the Lord often had to lament their disobedience as in the words recorded by Isaiah, "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea."

3-4. *Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; but in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD:*

Think of a Sabbath a year long, in which nothing was to be done but to worship God, and so to rest!

4-5. *Thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land.*

A restful period in a restful land, all land to have rest, and yet to have fruitfulness in that rest, the rest of a garden, not the rest of a task. Thus is it oftentimes with God's people, when they rest most, they work best, and while they are resting, they are bearing fruit unto God.

6-7. *And the sabbath of the land shall be meat for you; for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee. And for thy cattle, and for the beast that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat.*

There was to be no private property in the spontaneous produce of that year. It was free to everybody, free even to the cattle, which might go and eat what they would, and where they would.

Leviticus Chapter 25. Versus 17-21. *Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am the LORD your God.*

Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety. And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years.

Not merely for the one year of rest, but fruit for three years.

22. *And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat yet of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat of the old store.*

They were to have enough for the year of rest, and for the next year in which the harvest was growing, and still to have something over for the ninth year. They scarcely could want as much as that, but God would give them more than they actually needed, exceeding abundantly above what they asked or even thought.

That Sabbatical year had other blessings connected with it. Let us read about them in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter fifteen.

Deuteronomy Chapter 15. Verses 1-2. *At the end of every seven years thou shall make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth anything unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD's release.*

What a wonderful title for it, "the LORD's release"!

3. *Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release;*

How was a man to pay when he did not sow or reap during the Sabbatical year? The foreigner did not observe the year of rest, consequently he was bound to pay, and it was only fair that he should do so, but for the Israelite, who carried out the divine law, there was provision made if he were in debt.

4. *Save when there shall be no poor among you;*

If there were no poor, then there would be no need for this law.

4-6. *For the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it: only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee:*

That little clause, "as he promised thee," is worth noticing. This is the rule of God, He deals with us "according to promise."

6. *And thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee.*

If God's people had done His will, they would have been like their language, it is observed of the Hebrew by some, that it borrows nothing from other tongues, but lends many words to various languages.

7-9. *If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee.*

Moses, moved by the Spirit of God, anticipates what would very naturally occur to many, "I shall not lend anywhere near the seventh year; if I do, I shall lose it, for I must release my debtor then." The hardhearted would be sure to make this their evil excuse for lending nothing. But here the Hebrew is warned against such wicked thoughts, lest, refusing to lend to his poor brother for this cause, the needy one should cry to God, and it should be accounted sin on the part of the merciless refuser.

10-11. *Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land:*

They would have done so, they might have done so, if the rule of God had been kept, but inasmuch as He foresaw that it never would be kept, He also declared, "the poor shall never cease out of the land."

11. *Therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.*

See how God calls them, not "the poor," but "thy poor" and "thy needy." The church of God should feel a peculiar property in the poor and needy, as if they were handed over, in the love of Christ to His people, that they might care for them.

12. *And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee.*

He might be under an apprenticeship of servitude for six years, but the seventh year was to be a year of rest to him, as it was a year of release to debtors, and of rest to the land.

13. *And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty.*

To begin life again with nothing at all in his pocket.

14. *Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee, thou shalt give unto him.*

Who would think of finding such a law as that on the statute book? Where is there such a law under any governor but God? The Theocracy would have made a grand government for Israel if Israel had but been able to walk before God in faith and obedience.

15. *And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing today.*

The remembrance of their own deliverance out of Egyptian bondage was to make them merciful and kind to their own bondservants.

16-18. *And it shall be, if he says unto thee, I will not go away from thee; because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee; then thou shalt take an aul, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever. And also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise. It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee; for he hath been worth a double hired servant to thee, in serving thee six years:*

He has had no pay, he has been always at his work, he has been worth two ordinary hired laborers, let him go therefore, and let him not go away empty.

18. *And the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest.*

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—551, 544, 545

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